REKHA JAIN—MULTIFACETED PRODUCER AND PLAYWRIGHT

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At first sight Mrs. Rekha Jain strikes you as a loving grandmother whose world would centre around her family and home. It will take a casual acquaintance a couple of meetings to make him realise the manifold achievements Mrs. Jain has been able to fill into her life through hardwork, dedication, creativity and a love for children.

Rekha Jain is a well-known playwright, director and choreographer of children's plays. She is an eminent personality in the field of children's theatre, and has to her credit several children's plays and stories. Fifteen of her plays have appeared in four collections.

Besides these, she has written many stories and plays about and for children, which have not been published. When asked why she has not published them, her answer is 'the shortage of time to pursue the long process of getting the stories and plays published'.

For over 30 years Mrs. Rekha Jain has been a director and choreographer in the *Delhi Children's Theatre*. Before that she had her training in Children's Theatre under UNESCO experts in 1953 at the Asian Theatre Institute.

She has travelled widely to Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, East Germany, England, the former Soviet Union, U.S.A. and France as a Children's Theatre Expert, under the Government's cultural exchange programmes.

In 1979 she founded a Children's Theatre group named *Umang* which against all odds, maintains a high artistic standard. She wrote her first play because of a pressing want for child-centred plays for her theatre. In fact the major reason why Rekha Jain started writing for children was her inability to find enough plays written from the point of view of the child. Most of her writings commenced with the need to produce child-related stories and plays. She has also translated and adopted the writings of other Indian as well as foreign authors in order to direct a number of children's plays.

Her plays are staged by children and are also often programmed for T.V. and radio. To date, she has produced over 80 children's plays, written mostly by herself.

Even as a child, Rekha Jain would observe others and think about why people do the things they don't have to do. After her marriage in 1936, she completed her matriculation with the active support of her husband. This helped her in her innate desire to write. She would write about things that delighted or upset her in her personal diary. She thus began writing in a small way. To date, she tries to maintain a diary for herself.

She wrote her first story for adults way back in 1941, based on the famine of West Bengal. The story was titled *Sukhada.*

An expressive person, her letters to her family members from abroad were so informative and creatively stimulating that many of them were published in magazines and newspapers. Hence one can say that for Rekha Jain, writing is an inborn talent, perfected by a stimulating desire to put on paper the characters and situations she sees around her.

Her love for children is boundless, as can be seen by the patience with which she directs the children in the rehearsals for dramas, staged by various theatres such as *Umang, Delhi Children's Theatre* etc. My initial memories about Mrs. Jain go back to the big portico-cum-verandah in the junior section of Delhi Public School—Mathura Road. Here she spent hours with us till we had perfected each step for the final stage show.

Her basic understanding of the child's way of thinking, her firm belief that all children are equal and should be given equal opportunities, that all children have potentialities which need to be tapped, has inspired her to write for children. She starts by building a story around any situation that catches her imagination or that she considers important. Taking this seed-idea, she builds a story around it. While working on the story she also visualizes how children would enact it out on stage. Her next step almost always is to convert it into a play for the children's theatre.

Some of the factors which influence and guide her writings are a keen sense of patriotism as seen in the street play *Main Kaun Hoon* written at the time of the Independence struggle. *Diwali ke Patake* is a play highlighting another point about which Rekha Jain feels strongly, that is equality for all children.

Nowadays there is a lot of talk about 'Theatre-in-Education'. Rekha Jain realized its importance long ago and repeatedly emphasizes it. If one is able to make the child understand the importance of what he is being made to study, it would increase his motivation to learn. The play *Ganit Desh* written and directed by her, lays emphasis on this point. Her books *Hamara Sangeet* and *Aaj Kal* have been written by her for the teenagers. They throw light on the vast cultural heritage of our country.

Rekha Jain is strongly aware of the immense potentiality of children which can be brought out through rhymes, songs and dance, mimicry,

imagination, fantasy and realism. The subtle differences that society imposes on the girl child come forth in some of her compositions.

Besides writing specifically for children, she has published numerous articles on children's theatre, Indian music and dance.

This versatile personality is a music critic too and has also presented Indian folk music performances, and acted and danced in ballets. She also holds many important offices in organisations such as *Umang, Kalyani,* 12th Congress of the *Democratic Women's Federation,* and is also a member of other such organisations.

She conducts theatre workshops with children in different parts of the country. Some of her workshops have been held in Agra, Ujjain, Bhopal, Lucknow, Manipur and Bhilai.

In 1988 she was nominated by Indira Gandhi Open University to design the curriculum for its course on *Children's Theatre.*

In short, Rekha Jain is one of those who believes that 'work is life'.

Rekha Jain's published works:

1. *Khel Khilonon ka Sansar* (The World of Toys) Radhakrishnan Prakashan, Delhi, 1973. Second Edition, Vidya Prakashan Mandir, New Delhi, 1980.
2. *Diwali ke Patakhe* (The Fireworks of Diwali) Sahitya Sahakar, New Delhi, 1977.
3. *Anokha Vardan* (An Unusual Boon) Gyan Bharati Prakashan, New Delhi, 1981.
4. *Dayalu Rakshas* (The Benevolent Giant) Gyan Bharati Prakashan, New Delhi, 1982.

Rekha Jain's most recent theatre productions:

1. *Bahadur Chunnu* - adapted by her, based on the folktale 'Peter and the Wolf'.
2. *Ganit Desh* - (The Kingdom of Numbers) written by her was also telecast on T.V. some time back.
3. *Hey Mere Chanda* (by Rabindranath Tagore) with a few modifications in the theatre workshop was staged at Nehru Sanskritik Bhavan. This also was staged on Doordarshan.
4. *Kaun Bada Kaun Chhota* -an imaginative satire on parochialism and selfish power-seeking, written and staged by her.